

The Perception and Practice of EFL Primary First Cycle Teachers on Continuous Assessment: The Case of Borena and Guji Zones

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the perception and the practice of EFL primary teachers on the continuous assessment. The study was conducted at Guji and Borena Zones in Oromia Regional state. In the study, the grades 1-4 English teachers were used as target population of the study. The descriptive survey research design was applied, and questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis were used as data gathering instruments. From both zones, 20 primary schools were selected randomly by using simple random sampling methods. From each school, four English teachers were selected purposively, and then questionnaire was administered for 80 teachers whereas semi-structured interview prepared for only eight teachers purposively. By using developed checklist, the continuous assessment mark list used by English teachers was analyzed in order to check whether they use various styles and/or different types of continuous assessment in their teaching and learning process. All the data that gathered from questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis were analyzed thematically to make it triangulate. The results of the study from all data revealed that the teachers' perception and practice of continuous assessment at primary schools is positive. Even though teachers see themselves positively in terms of continuous assessment, the multi-sources of data evidenced that there are myriad of problems that impede them from applying it as their plan. Among these negative factors some of them are: large classroom, shortage of time, interference of external body, viz, principals, the expert from educational bureau, and teachers' family related problems. The study then concludes that the perception and the practice of EFL primary teachers on continuous assessment is positive despite some problems hindering them from applying it appropriately.

Keywords: Continuous Assessment, perception, practice, EFL primary teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopian government has been emphasizing on both educational coverage and quality education for all children whom their age reached for education. To reach planned goal, the role of the teachers have prominent place. The teachers' good perception, awareness and their level of understanding on subject matter, the methods of language teaching, the methods of assessment, how, when, what to test and for what purposes are things that need good understanding and awareness (Black 1993; Burns 1991 and Cyril 2005). Having good perception and practice of continuous assessment (CA) and the essentiality of it to enhance the learners' ability is very paramount. Unless the teachers have full understanding of the main purpose of assessment or testing and put it in to practice, it may difficult to assess what is expected to be assessed, and the plan of quality education may remain at theory level without reaching intended goal (Cown et al. 2014). Above all scholars like Mattos, A. (2000); MacDonald, R. (2006), strongly state that in order to achieve learners' skills, the instructional activities, evaluation mode, objective related assessment, the ability to use appropriate evaluation tools and etc. which teachers provide for their students play fundamental role in shaping what is learned in classroom.

Mainly, the education policy makers in Ethiopia had acknowledged the essentiality of continuous assessment in improving educational quality as stated in the 1994 educational policy. As it indicated in the policy, starting from primary education to higher institutions continuous assessment must be integral part of teaching and learning. If it is not well planned, organized or mentored carefully and not used for its primary goal, it has negative effect on students' learning rather than improving it. Therefore, perception of teachers towards continuous assessment play prominent role to bring quality education (Nitko 2005; Earl and Ellington 1997; Charter 1984; Clark 1989).

According to Nitko (2005) students may, to some extent, escape from the negative effects of poor teaching, but they cannot escape from the effects of poor assessment. Based on the current curriculum, the most expected goal to achieve from primary first cycle learners is to develop mainly their reading ability based on their grade levels. As the assessment is the essential part to realize students' academic promotion, it cannot be separated from teaching. The continuous assessment is a part and parcel of learning and teaching process, so trying to separate them is meaningless (Thomas 1993; Brooks 1989; and Michael 2010) Continuous assessment seems to be good route to reach intended destination of planned goal of education. Regarding this DES says: *'Supporting children's learning is a principal aim of schools. Assessment lies at the heart of this process. It can provide a framework in which educational objectives may be set and pupils' progress charted and expressed'*

(DES, 1988, as quoted in Dagne Turune 2009:2).

Children from the kindergarten up to grade four need close follow up of their teachers. At this grade levels, the most crucial thing for them is to develop their learning ability based on their grade levels. The main purpose of primary first cycle teachers should be to make their learners read and write the readymade materials based on their age or grade levels (Zakhe 2007; and Glen et al. 2007)

As it is denoted by the Ethiopian educational training policy of 1994, (75%) of the evaluation should be administered through continuous assessment whereas 25% should be taken through final examination for junior, high school, and preparatory school. For primary first cycle children evaluations carry out of 100% from continuous assessment with aim of free promotion. The purpose of this continuous assessment out of 100% is to develop the children's reading and writing ability based on their grade level. However, some conducted researches on Ethiopian children's reading ability shows that their reading and writing abilities are very poor. Good training and ability of subject matter, experience, knowledge of subject matter are crucial for teachers to develop their own understanding and self-esteem in academic arena (Bachman, 1990; Rundeer, et al. 2002; and Charles 1995).

United State of America Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with Ethiopian government has conducted research on Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in (2010) by selecting some languages from Ethiopia. The result of the research showed that students' reading ability from grade one - four is very low. As it indicated in their research 42.1% of grade one up to four children are unable to read and write even single word. Although, Continuous assessment is taken from hundred percent, the children's performance is low. Therefore, as the area of primary first cycle English as Foreign Language EFL teachers' perception and practice on continuous assessment seems to be neglected, the study was emphasized on it.

2. Research Methodology

Under this chapter an overview of the research design, research population, sample and sampling techniques, data collecting tools, data collecting methods, and data analysis procedures are presented.

2.1. Research Design

Descriptive survey research design was employed in order to identify the 'perception and practice of EFL primary teachers on continuous assessment' in Borena and Guji Zones, in Oromia Regional State. The researcher planned to apply survey research design because it seems to be paramount form of research design which is mainly used as data collection in a social science from large area and from many populations (Sarantakos, S. 1998, and Shohamy, E. et al. 1989). Therefore, as 20 primary schools and 80 primary English teachers were selected as a target population from different areas, a survey research design was applied.

2.2. Sample and Sampling Techniques

From the proposed Zones, 20 primary first cycle Schools were selected purposively as sample areas of the study because the researcher wanted to select them intentionally as these areas are near to the researcher's home. In both Zones, 80 English language teachers from primary first cycle schools were selected by using simple random sampling methods. Probability and non-probability sampling methods were used as sampling techniques. Purposive sampling method was used to select 20 primary schools whereas simple random sampling method was applied to select 80 primary English teachers as target population of the study. Questionnaires - close and open-ended, semi-structured interview and document analysis were prepared and used as instruments of data collection.

2.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Data which was collected through questionnaires were numbered numerically. Although descriptive survey research method was used, all data which were gathered through questionnaires analyzed via frequencies and percentage. Secondly, data which was gathered through semi-structured interview from English teachers and the data from document analysis were analyzed qualitatively. However, all data that gathered via three tools were analyzed thematically in order to triangulate them.

3. Result and Discussion

The analysis, interpretation and discussion begin from the quantitative method of tabulation and followed by semi-structured interview and ended with the document analysis.

3.1. Teachers' Perception towards Continuous Assessment

To obtain information under this point, eight questions were designed to gather information about the perception of the teachers towards CA. The items were number 1-10 as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1

No	Items the perception of the teachers towards CA	Ratings											
		SD		D		N		A		SA		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	Pre.
1	I have taken training on the methods of teaching	36	45	8	10	-	-	26	32.5	10	12.5	80	100
2	I have understood the importance of CA to enhance quality education	20	25	5	6.25	-	-	37	46.25	18	22.5	80	100
3	My students' ability increase because of CA	-	-	6	7.5			51	64	23	29	80	100
4	Giving CA continuously has no such positive effect on students' ability	47	59	8	10	-	-	10	12	15	19	80	100
5	Giving CA daily can cause the wastage of teaching and learning time	25	31	27	34	-	-	20	25	8	10	80	100
6	CA has positive effects on students' ability	-	-	-	-	-	-	45	56	35	44	80	100
7	CA is not such important for this grade level	41	51	27	34	-	-	8	10	4	5	80	100
8	The concept of CA is not clear to me	36	45	26	32	4	5	5	6	9	12	80	100
9	The role and importance of CA is not clear to me	46	57	17	21	3	4	3	4	11	14	80	100
10	CA plays prominent role to develop learners learning	2	2.5	3	4	-	-	56	70	19	24	80	100

Key: SD – strongly disagree, D – disagree, N—neutral, A – agree, SA – strongly agree

According to table 1 above, 36 (45%) respondents, said strongly disagree while 8 (10%) of them said disagree with **item 1** on which they were asked whether they have taken training on teaching methodology, whereas 26 (32.5%) of respondents responded agree and 10 (12.5%) responded strongly agree. Here, as data reveal, more than 44 (55%) of respondents did not take any training on teaching methodology. In addition to this, from open-ended questions some respondents indicated that they are teaching without taking any training on teaching methodology, and additionally, they mentioned as this is one of the obstacle to apply CA as integral part of teaching and learning. **Item 2** in which teachers asked if they have understanding about the importance of CA to enhance quality education, 37 (46.5%) and 10 (12.5%) of respondents said agree and strongly agree respectively. From the total number of respondents, 47 (59%) of them expressed their agreement. Opposite to this, 25 (25%) and 5(6%) of respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed. Besides, from semi-structure interview one of the respondents, Teacher B, said, “Continuous assessment is crucial essential part of teaching and learning to improve students’ academic ability if it is applied wisely.”

Item 3, in which the respondents were asked whether CA increase their students’ performance/ability or not, 51(64%) and 23(29%) of respondents replied by saying agree and strongly agree. However, 6 (7.5%) of respondents disagreed. Therefore, the result showed that more than 93% of the teachers believed that CA plays prominent role to enhance students’ ability. However, the result from document analysis shows that some teachers use daily classroom activities as CA rather than using different strategies, namely quiz, test, assignment and others.

Similarly, for the **item 4** in which teachers were asked to give their opinion on giving continuous assessment continuously has not have such a positive effect on students’ academic progression, 47 (59%) and 8 (10%) of respondents showed their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively. In addition to this, from open-ended question some respondents said, “Continuous assessment is very crucial to increase students’ academic performance if it is used correctly and appropriately. In other words, 10 (12%) and 15 (19%) of participants strongly disagreed and disagreed. In addition, interviewee, **Teacher D**, expressed his idea on continuous assessment saying:

When I see the merits and demerits of CA its demerits is greater than merits, why because we are forced to give CA out of 300. If we do not give CA at least up to 200-250% we will be considered as against government policy. Therefore, we forced to focus on CA daily rather than giving valuable objective for our children.

Item five which participants asked about if giving CA daily can cause the wastage of teaching and learning time depicts that, 25 (31%) and 27 (34%) of the respondents said strongly disagree and disagree respectively. On the other hand, 20 (25%) of respondents said agree whereas 8 (10%) of respondents said strongly agree. Therefore, the result tells that many teachers expressed their agreement with this item while only

a few of them disagreed.

Regarding the item 6 in which the teachers were asked about if CA has positive effects on students' ability, 45(56%) and 35(44%) of respondents said agree and strongly agree whereas none of participants said strongly disagree and disagree. However, some interviewees expressed their idea as continuous assessment has both positive and negative sides if not applied correctly.

As it can be seen from **item 7** which asked if CA is not such important for primary first cycle grade level, 41(51%) and 27(34%) respondents said strongly disagree and disagree respectively. 8(10%) agreed whereas 4(5%) of respondents strongly agreed. This indicates that 85% of the respondents expressed their disagreement with this item, so the researcher may conclude that almost all teachers have had awareness about advantage of continuous assessment though there are some obstacles to apply it appropriately. In addition to this from interview questions, one interviewee, **Teacher F**, confirms this idea by saying,

"The advantage of continuous assessment is very high to realize educational quality. However, the shortage of time, lack of appropriate teaching aid, lack of training on how to teach and how to make continuous assessment, interference of external body and lack of focus impede the real implementation of it."

Besides, the result from teachers' document analysis of their students CA record revealed that there are good attempt to make CA though they use one style of it.

Moreover, **item 8** concerned with whether the concept of continuous assessment is not clear to them at all, from given participants 36 (45%) of respondents expressed their strong disagreement and 26 (32%) of them expressed their disagreement. In opposite to this, 5 (6%) and 9 (12%) of participants expressed their agreement and strong agreement respectively, but 5 (6%) of the respondents remain neutral i.e. they did not reply for this item. Therefore, as 62(77%) of participants forwarded negative idea with the item, it may be possible to say that the concept of continuous assessment is clear for teachers despite there are certain problems to implement it.

From **item 9**, which said '*the role and the importance of the continuous assessment is not clear to me*', from given participants 46 (57%) of respondents expressed their strong disagreement and 17 (21%) of them expressed their disagreement. In opposite to this, 3 (4%) and 11 (14%) of participants expressed their agreement and strong agreement respectively, but 3 (4%) of the respondents remain neutral i.e. they did not reply for this item. Therefore, due to the fact that 63 (78%) of participants forwarded negative idea with the item, it may be possible to say that the teachers have understood the role of continuous assessment at the field of education. From **item 10**, which indicates '*Continuous assessment plays prominent role to develop students' Learning*', among given participants 56 (70%) of respondents expressed their agreement and 19 (24%) of them expressed their strong agreement. In contract to this, 2 (2.5%) and 3 (4%) of participants expressed their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively.

Generally, from table 1 item 1 – 10 in which the participants were asked about their Perception towards Continuous Assessment, the result of their response reveals that they have well understood about continuous assessment though there are a myriad of problems that impede them from applying it as much as intended.

4.2. Teachers Response on the Practice of CA at Primary 1st cycle Schools

Table 2

No	Items: The practice of CA at primary 1 st cycle schools	Ratings											
		SDA		DA		N		A		SA		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	Pre.
11	I use different continuous assessment in my class	4	5	6	7.5	-	-	38	47.5	32	40	80	100
12	I have my own CA plan for my student	-	-	-	-	-	-	52	65	28	35	80	100
13	I implement continuous assessment based on my plan	28	35	22	27.5	5	6	15	19	10	12.5	80	100
14	I give CA sometimes because it wastes my teaching time	12	15	18	22.5	6	7.5	30	37.5	14	17.5	80	100
15	Although I use CA continuously, there is no students' progress in their skills	17	21	10	12.5	10	12.5	20	25	23	29	80	100
16	I do not implement CA as I have planned	16	20	34	42.5	10	12.5	10	12.5	10	12.5	80	100
17	There are students' progress in their skills because of CA	12	15	22	27.5	8	10	20	25	18	22.5	80	100
18	I do not use CA at all	53	66	27	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	80	100
19	I use CA daily	8	10	12	15	6	8	37	46	17	21	80	100

Key: SD – strongly disagree, D – disagree, N—neutral, A – agree, SA – Strongly agree

Item 11 in which the respondents asked to express their opinion on 'I use different continuous assessment in my class' 38 (47%) and 32 (40%) of respondents said agree and strongly agree, whereas 4 (5%) and 6 (7.5%) of them said strongly disagree and disagree respectively. In addition to this, the response from

open-ended questions and interview indicated that not all of them but some of the teachers use different mechanisms of CA methods, whereas some of them are expressed their opinion as it is difficult to use different strategies of CA because of shortage of time and the level of the students are not permit to use it. Supporting this idea, one of the respondent from open-ended questions item number 1 said,

"The major factors that hinder me from using continuous assessment appropriately are shortage of time, good guidance how to prepare tasks that can measure what expected to be measured, lack of training how to prepare authentic asks for this grade level, large class size which is difficult to evaluate learners."

Not only this, most of respondents, but also responded similar answer on this item in the similar way. In addition, the results from interview question item number 3 which asked about the difficulties teacher encounter to apply continuous assessment, almost all of them expressed their opinion as large classroom, shortage time which given for each period, lack of aid materials, lack of training and influences of external body are among major factors which impede an implementation of continuous assessment.

Item 12 on which participants requested to give their opinion as if they 'have their own continuous assessment plan', 52 (65%) and 28 (35%) of respondents expressed their agreement and strong agreement with the item as all of them have their own plan of continuous assessment. In addition to this, the result from open ended and semi-structured interview and document analysis show that each teacher has her/his own continuous assessment for each semester. For example some of interviewee expressed their opinion by saying, *"Planning for continuous assessment at this grade level viz, k-4, is unquestionable as it is part of teaching and learning at this grade level. We plan out of 300% which can be converted to 100% at the end of semester. For each teacher, it is obligatory to plan."*

Item 13 which said *'I implement continuous assessment according to my plan'*, 28 (35%) and 22 (27.5%) of respondents said strongly disagree and disagree. This showed that out of all participants 50 (67.5%) of them expressed their disagreement with opinion. On the other hand, 5 (6%) of them remain neutral, whereas 15 (19%) and 10 (12.5) of them express their strong agreement and agreement. Therefore, based on given information one can conclude that almost all teachers indicated that there are obstacles that hinder the teachers from implementing continuous assessment based on their plan. Besides, almost all results from semi-structured interview and document analysis support this idea.

Item 14 in which they asked *'I give continuous assessment some times because it wastes my teaching time'*, 12 (15%) and 18 (22.5%) of them expressed their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively. Among selected participants, 6 (7.5%) of them remain neutral. However, 30 (37.5%) and 14 (17.5) of them expressed their agreement and strong agreement respectively. This indicates that some teachers are not give continuous assessment daily. In contrast to this idea, from open-ended questions and interview, almost all of them as they give CA daily. **Item 15** in which the teachers were asked concerned with students' progression because of continuous assessment, 17 (21%) and 10 (12.5%) of them said strongly disagree and disagree while 20 (25%) and 23 (29%) of the respondents said agree and strongly agree respectively, whereas 10 (12.5) of the participants remained neutral. This indicates that out of 80 respondents, 43 (54%) of them expressed their agreement as though CA are given continuously there is no sustainable change on students' academic progression. From open-ended questions and interview, almost all participants suggested there are a lot of students which cannot read and write even single word at grade two-four in which they set as this is their parents' related problem as they are not making follow up their students at their home. However, 27 (33.5) of the respondents express their positive idea on this opinion. Particular situation or factors which related with social life can combat students from developing their own skills the result is consistence with, to some extent, the research finding by Mary B. (2009), Zakhe Frans. (2007), Ancker, W. (2000), and Habtamu, T. (2009).

As it can be seen from **item 16** in which the participants were asked as *'they do not implement CA based on their plan'*, 16 (20%) and 34(42.5%) of participants said strongly disagree and disagree. In contract to this, 10 (12.5%) and 10 (12.5%) of them agreed and strongly agreed whereas 10 (12.5) of the respondents remain neutral. In addition to this, some of interviewees said: *"Although each teacher has his/her own CA plan out of 300%, it is difficult to implement even out of 200% because of large number of pupils within one class, shortage of time and shortage of aid materials."*

Based on **item 17** in which respondents were asked to express their opinion on *'there is students' progress in their skills because of continuous assessment'*, 12 (15%) and 22 (27.5%) of participants strongly disagreed and disagreed. In opposite to this, 20 (55%) and 18 (22.5%) of them agreed and strongly agreed whereas 8 (10%) of the respondents remain neutral. Therefore, researcher may conclude that though some of respondents express their agreement with this opinion, more than half respondents express their negative opinion with an item that means there is no such improvement on children's skills especially in reading and writing. In addition to this, the result from semi-structured interview and open-ended questions showed that not all but many students are even unable to read and write single word of their mother tongue.

Item 18 in which they asked to give their opinion on *'I do not use continuous assessment at all'*, 53

(66%) and 27 (34%) of them expressed their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively. This indicates that all participants expressed their disagreement/ negative opinion for the idea expressed as they do not use continuous assessment. Besides, item 19 in which participants of this research requested to forward their opinion on 'I use continuous assessment daily', 8 (10%) and 12 (15%) of them expressed their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively, whereas 37 (46%) and 17 (21%) of the respondents expressed their strong agreement and agreement and only 6 (8%) of them remain neutral. This indicates that though a few teachers do not give continuous assessment daily, many of them give it continuously. In support of this response, the result from open-ended and interview revealed that even though it is difficult to apply 100% as planned they use CA continuously as much as possible for exceptional of constraints that are mentioned so far.

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions were reached:

The study provided that although CA is very paramount to develop learners' academic ability, lack of enough knowledge of the subject matter, lack of materials, lack of adequate time, lack of training on how to teach and/or how to use different types of CA methods were stated to be among the factors that hinder the effectiveness and adequate implementation of continuous assessment.

The study reveals that the teachers are forced to plan for CA out of 300% which is too difficult to apply implement based on their plan. On the other hand, although they have agreed with the usefulness of CA to enhance teaching and learning process, teachers expressed fear of difficulties and challenges they have been facing because of some constraints that stated under result and discussion. As a result most of the teachers said that they, even though CA are given daily the students' reading and writing ability is very low.

As finding revealed from all data, it is possible to say that some teachers did not emphasis on teaching rather than focusing on what they called CA without understanding as CA is integral part of teaching and learning process.

Generally, the finding of the study has also shown that lack of sufficient materials, training on how to different CA strategies, the influence of external body that interfere in teachers' work, learners' lack of interest to learn and social related factors, namely family background, income/ salary etc., were raised as some major factors that impede CA from being implemented as much as intended.

5.2. Recommendations

On the basis of conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are forwarded

- ✚ As many of the teachers are teaching without got enough training, it would better if appropriate emphasis will be given to them
- ✚ Essential training should be given for primary first cycle teachers than any teachers at any levels as this is a stage in which children need immediate follow-up of their teachers. This is because, as far as my understanding, at this level children consider their teachers as source of knowledge and/or omniscient (knowing all). Therefore, at this level the children's mind is ready and active to accept everything from mouth of their teachers, pedagogically well trained teachers are better if assigned to them.
- ✚ Appropriate support should be given for teachers in order to create to make them like their profession
- ✚ As social related factors such as poor income and low living standard forced them to hate their profession, government would better if emphasis on funding them as much as possible.
- ✚ Teachers would better if they plan and implement continuous assessment rather than in forced by external body
- ✚ Appropriate emphasis and immediate follow up should be given for students as many of them do not improve their reading and reading ability thou continuous assessment given them continuously.

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